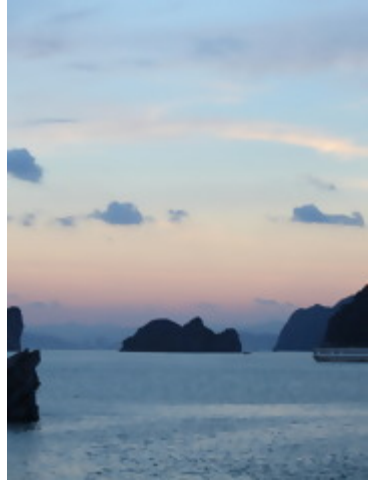

The Best Time of the Day by BoMin88

Category: Stranger Things, 2016
Genre: Friendship, Romance
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
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Summary: College can be intimidating, especially when you're a small-town boy moving to the Big Apple. Along with some of his childhood best friends, Mike will navigate life as a university student at NYU in NYC. But will Mike ever find the mysterious girl with a shaved head who he met briefly when 12 who still haunts his dreams? (In this world El is a mutant. Please review!)

1. Chapter 1

Hey everyone! It's Bomin (博敏) here. Feel free to skip the intro message. It is pretty long. I just was explaining a bit of the structure and my choices regarding the plot of this tale. The title is based off of a poem by Raymond Carver that I'll put at the end of chapter. I don't own copyrights to Stranger Things, The X-Men, or any of the late Mr. Carver's works.

I really hope that you enjoy this story. I played around with the plot of Stranger Things a tad. I thought it would be interesting to see what would have happened if Mike had only met Eleven once and then then were stranded from each other for years. I also wanted to see how age would influence their romance. Not to mention, I just wanted to age them a little, since I plan to continue this series for a bit and it is easier for me to sustain writing these characters realistically if they are a tad older. This also is a bit of a crossover. I decided that since Eleven has super powers, and I needed some way for her to receive enough education and have a stable enough financial base to even consider attending university, that she would be a mutant who had been rescued from the government lab back in Hawkins and who has since studied at Charles Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. The first two to three chapters will mainly establish how each of these characters came to decide to attend the same university and what brought them together. Due to that, there will be a lot of reflection and less character interaction at first, so I beg you to stay with me. I am not sure about how often I will update. I have already written the first few chapters, so those ought to be released quickly. However, I am slammed with work and I have a lot going on at the moment, so I am not sure how exactly I will add this to the mix. Still, I ought to update at least biweekly at the latest. I am new here and this is my second time actually publishing, so please be kind! I love constructive criticism and tips on how to improve.

Introduction:

Will's POV

At the end of Junior year, nagging worry started to pluck at Will's heart. He'd pretty much grown-up with Mike, Lucas, and Dustin, but

he wasn't sure what would happen to them in the future. Sure, it was great to claim that they would always be friends, but college changed you. He'd seen it happen to Jonathan. For Jonathan, college had been healing and encouraging. When Will had seen Jonathan during Thanksgiving break, he noticed how Jonathan laughed. Jonathan seemed happy, truly happy. He no longer seemed to be carrying a weight on his shoulders and he no longer slouched in the shadows.

Will never had an easy time in school. Okay, classes were fine, but socializing was tough. He just found it hard to open up and speak sometimes. When he was about to chime in a remark, he'd find self-doubt spreading through his chest like icy water and the words would get lodged in his throat. Mike and his friends had always been understanding, and their warmth had melted his fear, but Will wasn't sure if he would be able to make friends if he were forced to do so without the help of Dustin, Lucas, and Mike.

Still, what was he to do? He wants to go to university with them, but everyone has different career aspirations. Dustin wants to be a science teacher. He says that Mr. Clark inspired him. Lucas wants to be a cop. He claims he wants to help the underdogs. Will thinks Lucas was inspired by Chief Hopper, but that he doesn't want to admit it. Mike wants to be a psychiatrist. Mike points out that after Will' s stint in the Upside-Down and his poor treatment by the doctors, Max's abusive brother and toxic home, and his parents divorce, he realized the importance of mental health and having someone willing to listen. He isn't sure what Max wants to become. She hasn't really talked about it a lot. While Will, he wants to become an artist. Well, he'd like to become one. It seems like a daunting task and Will isn't sure if he'll be able to earn a living, but he just wants to be able to share his artwork and he hopes that some of the themes he covers might help out people in his predicament. All of them have different goals, and now Will worries that after Senior year they will all separate and grow distant.

Mike's POV

Mike noticed how Will began to come up with excuses to avoid hanging out with everyone and he was starting to worry. It had begun in Junior year and so far it had just worsened. Will didn't seem to have any new friends and he certainly wasn't dating anyone. Heck,

Mike had never seen Will express interest in any girl. Sure, he danced with girls if they asked him to at the school dances, but Will never seemed to want anything more than that.

It makes Mike wonder if all the jokes about Will being a fairy are true. He doesn't care if Will likes guys though. Will is one of his best friends; Mike loves him like a brother. Plus, Will understands Mike, and he tries to understand whatever problem Mike has when he comes to Will asking for advice. When they were younger, Mike had been closer to Lucas. They lived next door to each other and both of them had similar interests and kind of absent parents. But as they had grown up, Lucas and Mike had just started to separate. They were still friends, but Mike didn't feel like he could talk to Lucas about everything. For instance, when Will had gone missing and they were looking for him, Mike had seen a girl with a shaved head in the pouring rain. Mike had tried to point her out to Lucas and Dustin, but Lucas had adamantly refused to look and had claimed Mike was just imagining things.

Mike had never told Lucas or Dustin this, but he had snuck out and gone back to that spot later in order to find her. He had brought a blanket and some eggo waffles. With three kids, his house was stock full of them, and he knew his mom wouldn't notice missing waffles. Plus, he could just lie and pretend he had given them to Will. Since Will's mom had been a relatively new divorcee at that point, she had still been frantically trying to figure things out and Mike's mom was often trying to force food on skinny Will. In hindsight, Mike wonders if his mom had identified with Will's mom and was hoping that if she divorced his dad, then someone would help her out too.

He had wandered through the forest for what felt like hours until he found the girl huddled in Castle Byers. He'd knocked and murmured hello in order to not freak her out, but when he crawled in her eyes were full of fear, like a feral animal. He'd then plopped the waffles down between them and had tried to ask her questions. When that barely seemed to work, he had just begun to talk. Her eyes had glimmered then and she seemed interested, so he told her stories about Dungeons and Dragons, Star Wars, his toys, his friends, and his family. Her attention had wandered, but she seemed to like listening. She interrupted with a lot of questions about the meanings of various

words, and only kids who liked school ever did that in class, so Mike had assumed that meant she was interested. After a while she had relaxed enough that Mike could hand her the blanket without her wincing away. He still wonders what sort of abuse she must have experienced in order to feel that terrified of a boy as gawky as himself.

At first, he had tried to encourage her to come home with him. It was raining heavily and she looked drenched. Each time he had asked she had shaken her head "no" though, so Mike just scotched closer to her and shared the blanket's warmth instead. Eventually they both fell asleep with her head resting on his shoulder. That next day he skipped school. He wasn't sure why, but he just felt drawn to this girl. She didn't say much, but she had this magnetic charisma and he couldn't stop trying desperately to impress her.

After giving her his watch as a promise that he'd return, Mike had slunk back home to grab some food and a few more blankets, but when he had gotten back to Castle Byers, she was gone. At first he wondered if she had just left, but then he had noticed the blood. He'd followed the crimson splotches. His heart had punched against his ribs and his lungs had clenched: breathing became a battle. He forced his feet forwards and was greeted by the collapsed bodies of people in uniform. Frantically, he had looked around, but the strange, magnetic girl had disappeared.

Mike had searched for her for weeks. Sometimes he wondered if he had just imagined her. However, then he would look down at his empty wrist, it would confirm that she was real. He hoped she was alive. He never found her body though, so he likes to think that means that his magnet girl is out there somewhere wearing his watch and hopefully thinking about him too.

Somehow remembering the time he shared with her became a source of strength for Mike. He thinks it is thanks to her that he decided to apply to New York University. Alright, one of the reasons he was applying there was because he knows that Will wants to go to NYU as well, but he just wants to be a good friend. He worried about Will living practically on his own. Mike also wants to leave Hawkins.

After his parents had divorced, it felt like everyone in town besides

his friends, Will's mom, Chief Hopper, and Max's parents had sided with his father. No one seemed to care that Mike's dad had never really been a great father and had certainly been a terrible husband. When he was younger, Mike had not noticed. He had assumed all dads napped constantly when they were home, muttered generic one word replies, and seemed to avoid their family as much as possible. However, after his parents' divorce, while Mike was also angry at his mom for deciding to tear apart their family, Nancy had pointed out how tough it had been on their mom. At first, he hadn't wanted to consider how tough it must have been for his mom, and he started sleeping over at either Will's house, Dustin's place, or with Lucas in order to avoid accepting that his family was falling apart. But Nancy forced him to confront the problem and grow up. She might have changed once she had started high school, but Nancy is still a good older sister.

But right now, Mike is working on an application to NYU and hoping that surprising Will with the news that he also plans to apply for NYU and maybe a few other schools in New York City will make his friend happier.

Dustin's POV

Over breakfast, Dustin's mom had handed him the heavy eggshell colored envelope with a content grin. During the college application process, she had seemed so excited and so sure that he'd get into his top choice university: NYU. Dustin wished he had her confidence. Instead, his stomach did flips while he tried to fight down the nausea by chewing on some plain toast. Maybe he'd ask Steve if he wanted to meet up, and they could open it together? Dustin wasn't sure he was prepared to open the envelope alone, but he doesn't want the other boys to realize how scared he feels.

Lucas and Max had it easy. Neither of them needed to apply for colleges. Ok, so Lucas technically needed to apply for the police academy, but it was obvious that Lucas would get accepted, so he didn't need to worry. Max had a waitress gig lined up in Los Angeles thanks to her childhood friends back in Cali and she planned to try and find a job being a stuntwoman driving cars in action movies. Dustin figures that most people cannot drive nearly as well as the daredevil MadMax herself. Besides, most people don't want to

constantly put their lives for an adrenaline rush that pays their bills. Dustin certainly did not. No thank you. He prefers living, even if he doesn't have impressive stories of amazing exploits. So, MadMax would be hired pretty quickly.

Mike and Will were both applying for colleges too, but Mike aced all his classes and Will's drawings could make people cry. Dustin knew they had applied for NYU, so he had decided to apply too, but he doubted NYU would accept him. Who would want a small-town boy whose application essay had rambled on about curiosity voyages, discovery doors, and his middle school science teacher? He sounded geeky and lame. Gosh, Mike and Will would be accepted and he'd be left behind and forgotten. At least he had Steve. Oddly enough, they had become friends over the years and now Dustin thinks of Steve as his older brother.

…

At school Dustin bumps into Mike and Will before first period. Both of them are clutching envelopes with huge grins on their faces. He shifts his weight from his right foot to his left one and thinks of the envelope jammed into the front pocket of his backpack. His bag feels like he stuffed it full of bricks. Forcing a smile, Dustin walks up to them.

"Hey guys, you got your letters?" The words drop from his lips.

"Yeah, it's fantastic! Did yours arrive? Did you get in too?" Mike races through the questions and doesn't pause to breathe.

"Uh… Not yet. I sent mine in a tad later though, so maybe they just haven't gotten to it yet."

"Oh, ok. Well, I'm sure they'll accept you. Maybe we can try to be roommates? Nancy said she preferred renting her own apartment. I mean, that might be because she goes to an all-girls school and just needs a break from being surrounded by females sometimes, or because now she can live with Jonathan… But, I still think living off campus could be fun and I don't really want to live with Nancy and Jonathan and walk in on them anymore. That happened enough while they were in high school and at least pretending they didn't

hook up all the time. Plus, I would rather have you guys as roommates than some stranger and the more of us living together the cheaper the rent, yeah?"

Mike was already caught up planning for the future. He has that same frantic energy from when he organizes D&D games. Usually Dustin likes how excited Mike could get about the things he cared about, but right now Dustin really just needs to call Steve and see if he even got accepted. He doesn't want to be the one to pop Mike's bubble just yet. Plus, he sees how enthusiastically Will has been nodding throughout Mike's proposal, and the blush when Mike mentioned walking in on Jonathan and Nancy. Seems like both of them have witnessed that unfortunate sight. Dustin likes Nancy. She's always been sweet to him and even danced with him once when he was turned down by another girl. Still, he wouldn't want to be roommates. The probability of walking in on her at an importune time seems pretty high. Plus, inviting Steve to come up and visit would be awkward. He'd been there when Steve and Nancy's relationship had begun to fall apart and he saw how much that had hurt Steve. Dustin couldn't reopen those wounds. Why was he thinking of this though? He obviously wouldn't get accepted. He better start preparing to break the news to Mike and Will.

….

After school Dustin races home and calls Steve's home phone. When that fails, he bites his lip and begins dialing Steve's work number instead. At first, Steve seems confused to hear from him, but when Dustin spits out the words NYU and letter, Steve seems to grasp the situation. Steve ought to be getting out of work in an hour or so, but he promises that he'll talk to his Dad, explain the situation, and probably be at Dustin's house in thirty minutes or so. In the meantime, Dustin stomps back and forth across his living room while his mom watches television and smiles at him.

"I'm telling you, the letter only holds good news. They accepted you, dear" she starts to explain.

"How can you know that? How can you be so sure?" Dustin yells.

"Honey, you are a treasure. I have not seen many children with a

heart as warm as yours and the dream you wrote about in your college admissions essays is genuine and touching. You are also a lot smarter and more extraordinary than you seem to realize. I don't need to read that letter to know they accepted you."

After hearing his mom say that, Dustin slumps onto the sofa next to her love chair with a sheepish grin and watches TV with her while he waits for Steve to arrive.

A few minutes later, there's a quick knock on the door and Dustin rushes up to open it. Steve walks in with a grin and looks around.

"So, I brought cake to celebrate the good news" he gestures back to his car, "May I see the letter of acceptance?"

"I don't know if I got it in; I doubt it" Dustin murmurs.

"Kid, you're a genius. In middle school, you were explaining things scientific mumbo jumbo that I had never heard of and I was a senior at that point."

"You weren't exactly an ideal student" Dustin quips.

"Dustin, don't speak to Steve like that! Apologize..." his mom begins to lecture.

"No, it's alright. That's how we joke around. Besides, he isn't exactly lying" Steve laughs.

Dustin's mom hesitates for a few seconds, but then just smiles and offers to go fetch the cake while they open the letter.

Steve and Dustin crouch over the coffee table in front of the muted television. Dustin practically throws the letter at Steve, who then begins to carefully open the letter with a letter opener he smuggled from the office for the occasion. Dustin covers his eyes and demands Steve read the letter and tell him the news, so Steve scans through the letter while Dustin watches him through the slits between his fingers. Steve pauses, he takes a deep inhale, and pats Dustin on the shoulder. Dustin starts to shake and his desperate smile begins to dissipate.

"Well, Dustin, I got to tell you…" Steve seems to be trying to think of a nice way to tell Dustin that he better start preparing to be left behind by all his friends as they go out and explore the world. Dustin braces for the news.

"That you got in, little man! I am so proud of you! You know that your mom and I will have to go up there and visit you now, yeah? Plus, I can be sort of clingy, so you better out your social life on pause and call me occasionally, ok?"

Dustin just sits there for a minute or two. He sees his mom quietly comes inside with the cake and set it on kitchen table. Steve pats him on the shoulder and then walks up to her and seems to be telling Dustin's mom the news. She shrieks and starts jumping up and down. N Mews the second hisses and runs to hide under the couch beneath Dustin's feet. He slowly begins to blink and then a toothy grin explodes across his face. He's going to NYU! He's got to tell the boys!

This is the poem that this series is named after. I find it beautiful and touching.

The Best Time Of The Day By Raymond Carver Cool summer nights. Windows open. Lamps burning. Fruit in the bowl. And your head on my shoulder. These the happiest moments in the day. Next to the early morning hours, of course. And the time just before lunch. And the afternoon, and early evening hours. But I do love these summer nights. Even more, I think, than those other times. The work finished for the day. And no one who can reach us now. Or ever.

2. Chapter 2

Hey everyone, Bomin (博敏) here! I hope you all had a wonderful week so far. This is the second part of my introduction. After this, the characters, their motivations, and how they all came to study at the same university ought to be better explained and established. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me. Please take some time and review this. I could use all the recommendations and help I can get. Thank you for reading this! I hope you all like it.

Introduction Part 2

Eleven's POV

Most nights, Eleven woke up shrieking with her bed floating in midair and blood dripping from her nose at least two times. She'd will the bed down and then curl into a fetal position while stroking his watch… Well, technically she owns the watch now. That mysterious dark haired boy with warm eyes and parchment pale skin had given it to her before he left. He'd promised to come back, but the Bad Men had already found her by then. She'd fought them off, but eventually someone must have managed to sedate her, since the world had been obscured by buzzing black dots and the next time she had woken up she was back in her windowless room with Papa standing beside her bed.

It was at this moment that Eleven started to realize that most children did not live like she did. Most children seemed to have two parents who hugged them and they got to eat waffles until they were full. Most children went to something called a school. They played some weird, confusing game called Dungeons and Dragons where the monsters were imaginary; you didn't need to worry about them biting back. After her short-lived escape, Eleven had known she wanted to leave Papa and find that boy. She worried that the Bad Men would chase her and try to find them, but she could protect the dark haired boy.

At that time, the dark haired boy became her refuge. After a long day of searching for strangers and being smacked around, she would clutch his watch and go find him. He probably didn't realize just how

useful his watch would prove to her. He used it merely to tell time. She used it as a compass, leading her to him. She hoped he didn't mind. He didn't seem to though, since she often heard him calling out to her in the void. She wished she had told him her name. Instead he seemed to call her magnet girl. At the time, she had often wondered what a magnet was and if that was a good thing.

Soon, dreams could not sate Eleven. She had wanted freedom: starry nights, warm waffles, and him. The world outside sounded so different. It had things called music and movies. It had friends. The dark haired boy had explained friendship to her, but she could not quite grasp the meaning of the term. She couldn't envision it. He had called her a friend. Then, when she had thought of friends, Eleven had envisioned flushed cheeks and a pounding heart, warm eyes and a face-splitting smile.

Eleven had begun to imagine escape. She missed walking on the damp, cold green stuff that had tickled her ankles. She liked being able to run without hitting a wall. She liked space. She wanted to be able to stretch out her arms and not bump into some object or another. Eleven's imagined prison break soon had formed into the backbones of a real plan.
When Papa had forced her to travel through that ink realm, she not only saw the people she was assigned to search for; Eleven could also see the entirety of the laboratory where she was imprisoned. It was during one of these trips that Eleven had noticed the fire. In the dark in-between place, she could not tell exactly how it had started, but she could see a man wearing odd crimson glasses glaring at one of the exterior walls. Somehow, this man's stare seemed to slide through the brick like the needles slipped into Eleven's arms. Alarms had started to ring, drawing Eleven back. When she opened her eyes, she had been floating in the pool. She had torn off the fabric covering her eyes and willed the door to blast open. The thought required effort, but her elation had panic had proven ample fuel. The confused scientists had not known what to do. Some had seemed to move with purpose, but Eleven had stopped them with a flick of her wrist. Striding through the lab, Eleven had thrown aside any person who crossed her path. She would find that hole and get out.

She had planned to go find the dark haired boy, but instead she had

bumped into a man with knives sticking out of his bloody knuckles, a floating red-haired woman, some man with weird red glass in front of his eyes, and a bald man in some sort of moving chair. She had tried to explain that she had to leave this place quickly, but the bald man had answered all her questions and replied to the pleas she had not yet voiced aloud. He had explained that she had been in something called a government laboratory because she is a mutant. According to him, the government had wanted to use her gifts to find other mutants. The bald man explained that at the moment, normal people often were unfriendly to mutants, since they did not understand them, but that he hoped to make a future where mutants and humans could peacefully coexist. He then had proceeded to talk about how he had planned a rescue mission, but she had saved herself before they accomplished much.

…

Now, six years have passed and Eleven has gained a name and a family. The students and teachers at Charles Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters call her Jane. She is still adapting to the name. It has been years since she sought out her mentally ill mother and discovered her real name, but she grew up being called Eleven and even though she tries to scrub the memories out of her mind, they stain her past. She can't erase the tattoo on her wrist and she cannot delete these memories, nor does she want to. Professor X offered to try and help her hide her memories, but Eleven knew that doing that would fundamentally change her. She might be the smiling girl attending class and reading *Frankenstein*, but she was also the crying child stumbling through tests and sketching Papa. Her past made her who she had become. Also, she didn't want to forget the dark haired boy.

Professor X and Logan had helped her tremendously. Logan understood how it felt to be regarded as a test subject instead of a human, and, in his own gruff way, he had become a sort of father figure to her. They both practiced tough love and argued all the time, but when he wrapped her in a bear hug she knew he loved her. Professor X had taught her to read and helped her to work through the trauma of her childhood. She still had a long way to go, but at least she could sleep. Before, she would only fall asleep when the

wave of exhaustion from her insomnia crashed over her; but even then, the whole school had usually ended up undergoing earthquake-like tremors as Eleven fought the Bad Men in her dreams. Sleeping had been tough. It still is. The only good night's sleep Eleven can remember having is that time in the fort with the dark haired boy.

She still keeps an eye on him, which might seem creepy, but he calls out for her, so she is merely replying to him. Or… Well… That is how she justifies it to Professor X. She only talks to the boy when he is asleep anyway, so he probably does not even remember their conversations when he wakes up. She finds it a little weird that she's able to talk with him, since she has never been able to communicate telepathically with anyone else, but Professor X seems to think that this is a sign of her potential as a telepath, so he has her practice on other people sometimes.

Lately though, Eleven has been wanting to experience the real world. She sometimes goes along on missions, since you can never have enough telekinetic women around, but those are merely glimpses. Eleven has been trapped in one cage or another her whole life and she wants to walk around freely. She knows that Logan, Professor X, and her friends care about her, but Professor X's school remains a prison. A few months ago, the dark haired boy mentioned something called college and New York University to her when they were talking in their dreams. She asked around and Jean finally opened up and explained college.

After that conversation, Eleven decided she was definitely going to attend NYU. Even if she didn't find her dark haired boy, Eleven could at least experience life as a regular person. She wants to make memories, to try the rumored other flavors of eggo waffles, and to finally play Dungeons and Dragons. (She'd asked around before, but everyone told her only hard-core geeks played D&D, so she still hasn't gotten to play it yet. Eleven still wasn't exactly sure what geek meant, but it seemed like it must mean someone really cool and powerful, since people were scared to like the things geeks did.)

At first, Professor X seemed hesitant to let her attend NYU, but Eleven had the perfect argument. She had worked on it for weeks. She pointed out that Professor X wanted to have peaceful coexistence between humans and mutants, yet the mutants were mainly stashed

away at his school. She then proceeded to offer to help bridge the gap between humans and mutants by pretending to be a regular person and attending college. Someday, when everyone finds out she is a mutant, they would remember how sweet and normal she appeared and they would re-think their stance on mutants…. Alright, so her argument honestly was not the greatest, but Professor X had relented after a month or two of begging. Logan wasn't happy and he grumbled about it a lot, but he kept sneaking things that he bought her for school into her luggage, so he seemed to be accepting it.

Laura probably had the toughest time handling it. She and Eleven shared similarly traumatic childhoods; although Eleven had never been trained to become an assassin, so she shudders to think of the guilt that Laura carries on her shoulders. Still, both of them seemed to be made out of the same ingredients. Neither liked to talk that much and they both preferred to fight through their problems instead. Stuff between them had been tense at first, but after a few rounds sparring in the training room, Laura and Eleven had quickly become friends. When she left, Laura had actually pulled her into a tight hug. Eleven handed Laura a strip of paper with the address to her new apartment and her phone number before sliding into the car besides Professor X and a tense Logan.

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As they drove to the city, Professor X re-explained the details. He has an apartment in Manhattan that she is free to use. All her utilities will be paid for, and he will cover anything that her scholarships doesn't. If Eleven has a good time, then Professor X is thinking of starting a scholarship program for students from his school who want to attend university. Eleven is the first scholarship student, and she really hopes she won't become the last. Professor X then offer to help her pay for student housing instead one last time.

At this point, Eleven finally interrupts him, "I think student housing would probably be a nice way to meet people, but we both know I can't use it. I researched the dorms. I'd be sharing a room, unless I paid some exorbitant fee to have a single. Every time I sleep, the bed levitates. I'd be discovered the first night."

Logan snorts and looks out the window. Professor X nods sagely.

"I am glad that you are thinking this through maturely. My girl, I wish we did not need to hide, but I fear that we are required to at the moment. I had wanted to leave the housing decision to you, but I agree that it is best to have you live in an apartment with your own separate room. You could perhaps consider flatmates though," Professor X says with a twinkle in his eye.

He must have read her mind. She'd been writing and re-writing posters advertising empty rooms and cheap rent for about a week now. Just because she couldn't lie well enough to share a room didn't mean she couldn't share the apartment. It was huge. Besides, she could use the money she got from their rent for groceries and living costs. This way she wasn't constantly asking Professor X for money.

"Yeah, I was thinking about it. I figured it would be a good way to practice socializing, but I could still have some privacy."

"Sounds like a magnificent plan, dear."

The rest of the car ride passes in silence. Eleven reads, while Professor X seems to be listening to someone, and Logan stares out the window.

3. Chapter 3

Hi everyone! I hope you are having a great weekend so far. The story has transitioned out of the character introductions and I really hope that you enjoy it. Please feel free to comment and critique.

Chapter One

Mike's POV

He, Will, and Dustin had driven to NYC a few days ago and were currently crashing at Nancy and Jonathan's studio flat. Both of them were kind hosts, but a studio apartment wasn't meant to have five people living in it. Will was sleeping on the coach, while Dustin and Mike jostled for space of the floor. Most mornings, Mike smashed his head on the coffee table getting up. Nancy and Jonathan's place worked for a few days, but it couldn't function for a semester.

Jonathan had asked around, but most of his friends already had crowded apartments of their own. Nancy went to Barnard, so all her friends there were girls. She always warned Mike that Barnard girls tended to either be pure sweethearts so sickly sweet you got cavities by simply saying hello or lusty vixens desperate for any hint of a man at this point. Mike figures that she's probably just exaggerating, since Nancy always complains that she should have just gone to NYU or Columbia. Still, better not to chance it. He'd heard enough horror stories from Nancy to hesitate before saying hello to a Barnard girl, let alone living with one. So, Mike and Dustin had taken to glancing though the advertisements for an acceptable apartment and going to NYU and looking for posters offering housing. Will was busy catching up with his brother. Together the two of them spent hours wandering around the city taking photos, which Will would later use as references for his newest series of paintings and sketches.

As he spreads butter on his bagel, Mike decides that today they will find an apartment. He'd had a good dream and he can vaguely remember the murmurings of an oddly accented girl. He can't recall what she looked like, but he decided years ago that dreaming of her was a good sign. When he wakes up with her name on his lips and her voice humming in his ears, he always has a nice day. The last

time he remembered dreaming of her, he'd found out he'd been accepted to NYU. This dream girl is Mike's good luck charm. She's also his secret crush.

It's embarrassing, but he likes to imagine that the girl he hears in his dreams is his magnet girl with the shaven head. He barely knew her, but she was his first crush. So far, she and dream girl have been his only crushes, and he's convinced that dream girl is probably his imagination conjuring up magnet girl and making her older and more talkative. No other girl seems right. They all are eclipsed by the memories he has of that shaved head with a shadow of hair and those glimmering, wild eyes. Even now, when he thinks of her, his shoulder tingles where she leaned on him while sleeping.

He needs to stop dreaming of her and actually live his life though. Lucas has been teasing him for years about it, and he knows that Lucas is right. The real thing is better than a faded memory. But anytime he tries to force himself to like another girl, it just feels fake. He starts to compare these girls to his magnet girl, and none of them can beat her. Besides, he almost feels guilty when he does. His heart hammers, his palms sweat, and he swears he can hear her scolding him for cheating on her. Which is stupid, right? She's supposed to be just some girl who he slept beside once when he was twelve. She ought to be just some girl who listened to him ramble about Star Wars and walked through the woods, holding hands with him. God, just thinking of holding hands with her makes his heart race and his face flush.

He frantically stands up. He needs to clear his head. He's going to start college in a week and here he is dreaming about this girl he met when he was twelve. This year, he will finally give up on her. This year, he will do what Lucas said and get a girlfriend. Now, he just needs to find a flat.

Eleven's POV

She'd put up the poster two days ago and had been anxiously conjuring up imaginary roommates ever since. She practiced asking them questions about their major, their hobbies, their dreams. She wonders what they will be like. She wants to make friends, but she also needs roommates who will respect her privacy and be too

preoccupied to genuinely care. If her flatmates start to ask questions, she's screwed.

Eleven's not a very good liar. She likes to blame it on the fact that she was taught English so late. She'd picked up words in the lab, but she hadn't been at a conversational English level until she was thirteen. Her English was so poor, that when she had escaped her first time, she could barely talk with the dark haired boy, and she hardly understood anything he had said. God, he must have assumed she was an idiot. She touches his watch. Maybe she is an idiot? She's been pining away for this boy who probably forgot her. She's turned down dates out of some odd sense of loyalty to a memory. Logan always shakes his head whenever she mentions the dark haired boy and Laura always mutters that a dream will always be a dream. But Eleven just doesn't feel ready to give him up yet. Besides, he still calls out to her in his dreams. That has to be a good sign, right?

Since arriving here, she started to scrummage around for things that the dark haired boy had mentioned liking. She found used Star Wars VCR tapes and a Yoda action figure at a store that sold objects that other people previously owned. Professor X's apartment has a television with a VCR player, so she watched all the Star War films those first two nights. He was right! These films are good. Back at the Professor X's school, they didn't go to the movies often and most of the teachers made sure they had a library full of books, not films.

Just as one of her blueberry eggo waffles pops out of the toaster, Eleven hears the phone ring. It's either a potential roommate or Laura. She sprints to the phone with her waffle in hand. Just as she is about to take the phone out of the cradle she starts to feel the waffle's heat and she drops it. No! She stops the fall and lets the eggo float while she answers the phone.

"Hello?" She asks

'Hi, I.. umm… I saw your poster and I wanted to know if you were still looking for roommates. My friends and I need a place to stay and your apartment sounded nice…" It's a male voice. He seems a smidge nervous, and it makes her giggle.

"You are the first that called about it actually" God, she hates her

voice on the phone. It shows just how unnatural her English is. She always takes a while to form the words and they usually seem to fall flat.

"Really? But the rent is so cheap for Manhattan."

"I only put it up a few days ago, and it is a tad late. Most people probably secured housing," she starts to explain.

"Well, it seems perfect. Umm… is there some sort of interview? Do you want to meet my friends and I in person? I could try to get recommendation letters, if you want? I heard those are useful, but I am just a freshman, so I never really lived on my own before… Not technically," he speaks so quickly that Eleven struggles to understand everything. Prior to this, she thought her English had improved a lot. Maybe the others at school just spoke slowly when with her? It would make sense.

"No letter. Just come with your friends. We can talk" she interrupts him and she knows her English sounds terrible at this point. At least he's been nice and ignored it so far.

"Oh, sure. That sounds great! When can we could we arrange the interview?"

"… Anytime…" She sounds like she has no social life. Now she won't get roommates. They will think she is too lame. Wait, why is she so nervous? Eleven usually doesn't get that stressed. She even fought Magneto and Mystique separately and didn't feel nearly as worried as she does right now.

"That's great! Umm.. let me check with the others. Give me a sec…" She can hear him yelling, "Will, Dustin wake up! I found an apartment. We got an interview today. Come on, get up!" She decides to wait for him. He seems busy. "Ok, so would meeting in an hour work?" he finally asks. Eleven looks around the apartment. So far she didn't have enough stuff for it to be messy. She needed to finish breakfast and shower, but an hour seemed like ample time. Maybe she could even start re-watching Star Wars again?

"Sure, see you then…"

"Hey, I'm Mike Wheeler. My friends are Dustin Henderson and Will Byers. What's your name?"

"El… Jane"

"Eljane? I never heard that name before. Where are you from?" She hears someone muttering something in the background. "Shut up! I am just trying to be friendly" Mike seems to yell. She cannot hear him distinctly though.

"Oh, sorry. Umm.. My name is Jane, but…" She hesitates to think of an excuse for the slip up. "But my friends call me Eleven as a joke" she decides to just be truthful.

"Eleven? Is there a story behind it?" He sounds bemused.

"Um… it is a long one." Excuses, excuses…. Please, she needs something… anything.

"Ok, maybe you can explain it when we come over later? Do you like coffee or hot chocolate?" He seems so nice. He asks a lot of questions, but maybe it would be alright? She wants to live with someone this nice and interesting.

"Yes, perhaps. What is coffee?" Is it the brown liquid she sees some of the teachers drink each morning? Or maybe it is the amber one Logan likes? Eleven hears him laugh then. It makes her face heat up and her heart beats quicken.

"I'll bring you a hot chocolate then."

"Ok... Thanks" She sputters and then hangs up.

Eleven looks at the eggo hovering at eye level. She glares and it floats towards her mouth. She takes a bite. Darn, she talked long enough that it became cold. She'd never tried blueberry waffles before, and she'd been really excited about them too. Better not to waste food though, so she continues to eat absently while trying to imagine what Mike Wheeler looks like. As she prepares to shower, she finds herself paying extra attention to her clothes. For the first time in her life, she wants to look cute.

Mike's POV

The girl on the phone had the same accent as the one in his dreams and it was messing with him. He should have been professional when on the phone, but as her accent had begun to grow more noticeable while they continued to talk, he wanted to berate her with questions. Listening to her intrigued him. She seemed so mysterious and fascinating. He wanted her to be his magnet girl.

He nudged Dustin with his foot and pushed Will until they finally woke up. Dustin grumbled and glared a bit, but Mike was starting to realize that this was normal for Dustin in the morning. He glanced at his watch, it really wasn't that early though. It was already almost ten.

"Come on, I found an apartment. Get ready," he chided. Dustin turned to him with a dazed look on his face.

"So? Why do we need to rush?"

"Because we're meeting her in an hour and it takes thirty minutes just to get there. Plus, we got to stop by that café Nancy likes and grab a hot chocolate, so that will probably take another fifteen minutes. Hurry up! You can shower or you can eat, but if you keep sleeping you won't get to do either." Will blinks the sleep out of his eyes and looks at Mike pensively. Mike's stomach starts to shrink.

Anytime Will looks at him like that, it means Will is practically reading Mike's mind. Sometimes Mike wonders if Will is one of those mutants people hear about on the news. They'd only had a couple kids at his school turn out to be mutants, and he didn't know either of them very well, but none of them had seemed particularly harmful. They just seemed scared. Whether or not Will was didn't really matter. Mike feels the same way about Will potentially being a mutant as he does about Will maybe being gay: Will is his best friend and that means Mike accepts Will for Will.

Will silently gets up and glides to the bathroom. Mike hears him mutter something about eating breakfast on the subway. Dustin collects himself, finally gets out of his sleeping bag, and stumbles towards the pantry. He grabs a bagel, pops it in the toaster, and turns

to Mike as he waits.

"So, cute girl?" Dustin grins good-naturedly. Mike sputters.

"How… how did you guess?"

"Man, you offered to buy her hot chocolate and you are practically pushing us out the door in your hurry to get over there. Sure, sleeping on the floor isn't fun, but you wouldn't have rushed this meeting unless you were frantic to meet her in person" Dustin explains with a grin.

"You know, I really think you would be a great psychiatrist, Dustin."

"Nah, I got my heart set on teaching. I'm determined to one day be some nerd's more handsome version of Mr. Clark. What would have happened if we didn't have someone like him during middle school? He pushed us, and he also encouraged us to be proud of being nerds. Besides, I wouldn't want to cause you to lose your job."

Mike laughed, Dustin always seemed so sure of himself and so positive. He wished he could be more like him, but Mike just always seemed to take things too seriously. Dustin's bagel popped up. He put another in the toaster for Will and started to smear his own with cream cheese. They formed a companionable silence while waiting on Will.

…

The line was even longer than usual, but they had managed to grab Jane's hot chocolate, Mike's coffee, Will's tea, and Dustin's cappuccino. Hands full of hot beverages, they sped to the nearest subway exit. Luckily it was only five minutes walk and the subway was not too crowded today. For the entire ride, Mike kept trying to envision what Jane looked like. She sounded so similar to the girl from his dreams. Maybe they were from the same country? Perhaps they are the same person? Who was he kidding? He needed to stop fueling that fantasy before it made things awkward. Jane seemed shy on the phone and she probably didn't want to forced into playing the role of mysterious magnet girl of his geeky dreams.

…

Mike usually liked to be the navigator, but they were running short on time and Will knew the streets of New York far better, so Mike begrudgingly handed him the poster. Jane had printed a map and circled her apartment on the back. She'd even included directions on how to get there from NYU. She seemed pretty meticulous. Will glanced down, smiled at Mike gratefully, and immediately started to pull them along.

The area seemed nice. Mike had to crane his neck just to see the tops of the buildings, but they all were clean shades of grey. The streets weren't littered with trash and the walls weren't painted with graffiti. He liked it. Plus, he'd already noticed a bagel shop and a grocery store, so, if the prices were decent, they wouldn't need to travel far for necessities.

Will glanced down at the poster and then quickly turned to the right. They started to wander down a paved path in a park surrounded by apartment buildings.

"Look for building 11A, guys" Will muttered as he glanced around. While Mike looks frantically from building to building, he notices Dustin walking up to a couple sitting on a bench. He talks and they all laugh together for a few minutes before Dustin returns with the middle aged couple following behind him.

"They said they wouldn't mind walking with us to building 11A. Apparently they are relatively new to the Big Apple too." He smiles, "Us newbies have to stick together."

Mike and Will stay silent while Dustin chatters away with the couple. As they are getting closer to her apartment, Mike's heart starts pounding. He passes Will Jane's hot chocolate and his coffee, since Will finished his tea and bagel ages ago and wipes the sweat off of his empty palms onto his jeans and gulps. The couple stop and point to a tall, steel grey building with a black 11A to the right of the doors. Will nudges Mike forward with a grin and Mike looks back with a sheepish smile and nods his head in thanks. Pulling the door open, the boys wander inside. Their footsteps echo across the marble floors and Mike strides towards the buzzer. He presses the buzzer for flat

12C. It rings for a few second before a husky voice answers back. There's a spark of electricity racing along Mike's spine.

"Hello, it's Mike Wheeler here. Um, I got you that hot chocolate I mentioned. May I come up?"

"What? Oh, sure."

He hears a click and he, Will, and Dustin rush to the elevator. He presses the steel button and leans back against the walls of the elevator.

"Will, could you pass me my coffee?"

"Sure, so the reason you barely drank it was so that you could chat with Jane over drinks." Will phrases it as a question, but it seems more like a statement to Mike.

"Is that lame?" Mike worries.

"No, sweet" murmurs Will, who smiles to himself and passes the coffee to Mike. Dustin just smirks and wiggles his eyebrows up and down. The elevator doors open and they walk to apartment 12C at the end of the hall. Dustin presses the doorbell, but Mike hears someone yelling, "No! Not Han… Please!"

"Are you ok?" She said Han right? Is she watching Star Wars? Oh man, if she is watching Star Wars then even if Jane isn't the girl from his dreams, he might fall for her anyway.

"Oh, um… sorry… the walls are thinner than I thought. I just got caught up in the film. I know how it goes, but it always upsets me when they freeze Han Solo. It just is awful to be trapped and unable to do anything about it, you know?" He hears her reply through the door and Mike doesn't need a mirror to picture how much his checks are flushing. His face feels like its burning. The door slowly opens and he walks in practically entranced.

He sets the drinks down on the oak table before turning to look at her. His heart stops pumping and Mike's lungs don't seem able to function. Her eyes seem to glimmer with wildfire and her coral lips are curled up in a slight, playful smile. The tips of her curly

mahogany hair reach down past her shoulders. She has a waifish build and long legs. On her wrist, he spots a clunky black, plastic watch. It looks exactly like the one he gave to his magnet girl. He wants to reach out to her, to touch her, to ask if she's even real. Instead, he just stands there, rooted in place.

Perhaps realizing that Mike is completely frozen, Dustin clears his throat.

"Hey, I'm Dustin, this is Will, and he's Mike. Dustin punches Mike playfully in the arm and forces a friendly grin. The girl tears her eyes away from Mike and her grin widens.

"Hi, I'm Jane. The apartment is really big. I have three extra rooms, so the numbers seem kinda perfect." She seems to force out a laugh, but to Mike it sounds like the chiming of bells. She carries herself a tad more confidently than his magnet girl did, but the resemblance seems uncanny. While she's looking at Dustin, he pinches the crease of his elbow. Ow! Ok, so he is awake. He swears she keeps taking glances at him. Maybe he seems like a lanky freak? He needs to speak up.

"Looks pretty… the apartment. Um... Here's your hot chocolate. Nancy loves this place. She says it makes the best drinks in New York." He blabbers on mindlessly. Why is he talking about his sister like some dweeb?

"Nancy?" Her voice dips and her eyes lower to the floor. He notes that the tips of her ears have turned scarlet. It's cute.

"My sister. She's a student at Barnard College. We've been staying with her and her boyfriend, who is also Will's older brother, while looking for an apartment. It's a bit of a tight fit though, so we're hoping to move out as soon as we can." He keeps on talking nonstop. She doesn't care. He needs to stop before she thinks he is a huge nerd with no social skills.

"Oh, sister" Ok, he swears she just smiled for a second… Fine, maybe he wants her to smile and he imagined it.

'Yeah, um… so I'm a student at NYU. Well, I am not a student yet.

The semester hasn't started." He laughs awkwardly. God, what is he doing? "I plan to study psychology. I want to become a psychiatrist. Will's an art student at NYU, and Dustin is an education major who plans to teach middle school science." Someone please just shut him up. He stares desperately at Will, who smiles back gleefully.

"Mike's a great student. He could help you with classes. He tutored a lot in high school" Will chimes in. She looks at Mike with a hopeful smile. His lungs stop working. His heart threatens to leave his chest. His stomach is flipping and floating around.

"Even English?" She asks hesitantly.

"Yeah, I love literature class. I was more into science when younger, but I really started to appreciate literature after my parents' divorce. It helped me to process the situation and emphasize with both parties. I'm a huge fan of Carver, personally. I appreciate the scarcity of his prose and how he masterfully captures his characters and their trauma in his short stories." Ok, he officially is a nerd and she will never want to hang out with him.

"I… I like Carver too. His rhetoric impresses me," she seems to be trying to force her mouth around the next words, "Could you help with speaking though? I… I learned English later into my childhood. Sometimes I worry that my English sounds bad" she states the words slowly and morosely. She seems to take her time when she speaks, as if the words are berries that she wants to taste. Mike wonders what her first language is instead.

"No, no… Your voice is beautiful… Oh, uh.. I mean that your English sounds nice. I can help you work on it though. Maybe you just need more practice to gain confidence?" Did offering to help her with English count as a date? He needed to thank Will afterwards.

"Yes! Yes, please." She nods enthusiastically and her eyes seem to shine even brighter.

"When could we move in?" Interrupts Dustin. Mike really hopes she says soon. Will glances at him quickly and then hides his grin.

"Today?" She asks, looking over at Mike. He feels dizzy. He's just not

sure if it is due to oxygen depravation or from nodding so frantically. She smiles and he notices her long, gracefully eyelashes. He can hear Dustin trying to hold back his snickers, but Mike ignores him. He's going to move in with the girl of his dreams, his magnet girl. Now he just needed to become the man of her dreams and everything would be perfect. Wait… that was going to be tough. How could he become cool in a few hours?

4. Chapter 4

Hey everyone! It's Bomin (博敏) here. Thank you for the concern and I apologize for taking so long to release this chapter. The last few weeks flew by. One of the clubs I participate in had an event that took me out of town and I didn't have time to update. I plan to continue working on this story for a long time and I hope that through practicing my writing will improve (you all deserve the best). I want to warn you that the next month or so will be hectic. I have research papers and finals coming up, and after that I will have an extended stay abroad. (Wow, I am posting a lot of personal details… jajajaja.) Nevertheless, I will try to maintain my weekly updates. If I think I might miss a week, then I will post on both Friday and Saturday either the week before or the week after as a way of making up for the chapter I missed. Please review if you have time. I really want to know how I can improve so that I can properly tell this story. I hope you all have had a great week!

Chapter Two

Will's POV

Since he was a child, Will has always preferred to watch and to listen. He uses it as an excuse to explain what he knows. He finds it easier than coming out. The world regarded people like him cruelly. Others just weren't ready for sorts like him yet. He struggled through school enough as a geeky, awkward nerd. Imagine what would have happened if people knew the full truth. Sometimes he feels guilty about not telling his friends though, but secrets spread in small towns. Each person who hears the secret passes it along, and in half a day the whole town knows. He probably could have told Mike, but Dustin… Well, Dustin has a bad habit of opening his mouth at the wrong moment. Not to mention, Will did not want to tell one of his best friends and not the others. If the conversation had come up, he might have mentioned it, but it never did. Will can't tell if he wants it to talk about it or not.

Now that he, Mike, and Dustin are studying in New York, he plans to tell them. Eventually… He just doesn't know how to tell them. Part of him worries that they won't accept him after finding out. He tries to

quash that irrational feeling. Jonathan has been encouraging him to tell his friends for years. If even Jonathan encourages him to talk about it, then he ought to tell them the truth.

Will looks over at Mike, who's frantically throwing socks, shorts, and figurines into his luggage. Mike's mind seems to be day-dreaming about their new flatmate. Mike seems nervous, but Will knows Jane reciprocates Mike's feelings. Mike really shouldn't worry. Throughout their little meeting, Jane was fixed upon Mike; she barely looked away from him. Jane looked at Mike like a land-locked fish looks at the sea. Mike had regarded Eleven similarly, but a tad more subtly. Mike had the habits of an overthinker; he wouldn't reveal his inner thoughts as openly as someone as direct as Jane might.

Dustin nudges Will and nods towards Mike, "So, looks like we got a pair of lovebirds. I'm sorta jealous. I was hoping Steve's lessons would have gotten me a girl first." A hearty belly laugh rumbles from Dustin. Will still hears a chord of sadness at the core of Dustin's joking announcement. Poor Dustin. He'll find someone soon. Dustin's warmth would draw girls in, and his jokes and easy-going nature would keep them around. Dustin just needed to be patient. At their age, girls still wanted jocks, popular guys, or bad boys. Look at Nancy. She had dated Steve before realizing that Jonathan suited her more. Will liked Steve. He knew Steve had a warm heart and good intentions, but Steve felt too soft. Steve liked small town living and appreciated the details of daily life. Nancy felt sharp. She needed to peel away the lies and she had an acrid taste. She enjoyed the thrill of adrenaline as she faced death with steely eyes. Steve and Nancy could stay friends, but Will couldn't picture them as anything more. Nancy's danger might attract Steve for a while, but eventually the novelty would wear off. The different paths they walked on would turn them away from one another.

Eleven's POV

He found her. Her dark haired boy turned up on her doorstep just days after she came to the city. Her heart soars within the confines of her chest. For the first time she can remember, Eleven wants to dance. She wants to sing and to laugh. She wants to run after him and just hug him. She doesn't know if she'll ever let go if she starts hugging him though, so she stops herself from fleeing the apartment

and sprinting to his side. Soon, he'll live with her. Maybe he could even have the room next to her own? Then she'll have an excuse to make sure that he's the last one she says good night to and the first one she greets in the morning. For some reason, these sorts of details matter when she thinks of her dark haired boy. She wants the rest of his mornings and all of his good nights. She wants to wake up beside him.

God, she needs to stop this. She spent one night and the following day with him years ago. He could have forgotten her by now. If he hasn't, then he probably has only a fuzzy recollection of her. But once, her world was composed solely of him. He showed her life on the outside. Now she has family and friends. She has a father. She has a sister. She has friends. Her world has widened. Nevertheless, he was the first one she met on the outside. He showed her eggos and named the stars.

She has to call Laura. Well, Laura might disapprove of her having flatmates. Maybe she should wait a week or so? Just so that she has evidence to show she can handle living with a few normal people. Besides, Laura usually trains around this time, so someone else would pick up the home phone. It wouldn't matter if Psylocke picks up, but other students might prove chattier. She doesn't want Cyclops to know. He always demands that they all follow the rules. He'd try to stop her. He wouldn't even give her a chance to try. Besides. Professor X supported her.

If her dark haired boy wants to move in, she should really decorate the place. It must look so boring. Eleven doesn't mind the empty walls. They remind her of blank pages: full of possibilities. Most people would disagree though. She saw how the others decorated their rooms back at the mansion. Most of them made wallpaper out of posters, pictures, postcards, and mementos. When those kids decorated their rooms, they pasted their souls on the walls. They bared and celebrated themselves. Eleven's skin crawled at the thought. Still, maybe this could help her dark haired boy see her for who she is?

Eleven starts to write a list. She'll start to look for posters… And cuter clothes. She never really cared much about clothes. As long as she didn't feel too warm or too chilly, she did not mind the pattern or cut

of the cloth. He'd seen her in some loose jeans, a ratty Ghostbusters t-shirt, and flannel; he probably doesn't even realize her sex. Feeling her chest, Eleven sighs. She certainly lacks the proper curves. Jubilee claimed milk helped, but Jubilee's t-shirts lay flat across her chest. Laura and Psylocke acted like boobs just grew overnight.

Mike's POV

Mike felt like an idiot. Jane, who Mike feels convinced is his magnet girl, stood right in front of him, yet he could barely stumble through sentences. Even if she remembers him, Mike had just ruined his chances. He could barely speak, and then when he did he just blabbered on about Raymond Carver. Mike had grown up with the taunts and the whispers. Mike knows that most people would staunchly categorize him as a nerd, but he just wished he had looked cool this one time.

Sighing, Mike shoves more clothes into his duffel bag. He just wants to get back to Jane's apartment. He wants a second chance at making a first impression. Well, he couldn't exactly call this a first impression. Still, he wants another chance. He wants to impress her. He doesn't know how though. She seemed to like Star Wars as well, so they could talk about that. But how much could he talk about Star Wars before she considered him a geek?

"Mike, Mike… hello?" Nancy has started to snap her fingers in front of his face.

"Yeah, hey… We found an apartment."

"Yeah, I know. Dustin told me over an hour ago. He also mentioned a girl… Look, I probably seem like a hypocrite for saying this, but are you sure it is a good idea to move into a place with someone you are interested in like that? I mean, it has worked out for Jonathan and I, but we have been dating for years now. We knew each other and we also both had friends who could lend us a couch to sleep on if… Well, if we broke up, which I hate to think about because Jonathan… Jonathan… He helped me grow up and he's been my companion every time the world seems like it will end. We've been together through a lot of rough times and we've pulled each other out of plenty of sticky situations."

When younger, Nancy would sit with the boys as they played Dungeons and Dragons. She would burp and laugh along with them. Her starting high school had really tested her and Mike's relationship. She'd stopped wanting to talk or hang out, so Mike had chosen to ignore or tease her. When times got hard though, Mike and Nancy had started talking over breakfast and even hung out together in public. They hadn't talked much about their love lives though. Mike had never had one and Nancy had been the central protagonist of the high-school soap opera they call dating.

"Nancy, nothing will happen. Do you think that some girl who lives with me would want to date me when none of the girls at school ever have? I cannot pretend I am someone else every hour of the day."

"Look, I know I teased you a lot when we were younger…."

Mike interjects, "You still do."

Nancy sighs, "Fine, I know I tease you a lot about being a nerd, being geeky, being shaped like a scarecrow, your weird friends… You get the point. Anyway, I know I tease you, but that is because I am your older sister and I was not mature enough to tell you how much I cared when I entered high school. At that time, I wanted to have cute boys like me and all the girls want to be me. I was stupid and self-absorbed. Sometimes I still can be. But… you are a great guy. You are smart, loyal, understanding, and you are a leader. Besides, you and your friends never gave up what you guys liked simply to fit in. That takes a lot of bravery. There were girls who were interested in you during high school. I saw them watching you. You were just too preoccupied to notice. You always had that stupid game on your mind. I had started to wonder if you were gay."

"I am pretty sure girls only looked at me to mock me."

"Sorry, no. Girls in middle school and high school might still be idiots, but there were a couple smart enough to realize what a catch you are."

. "If you thought I was gay, why did you never ask?"

"… Well, I didn't need to. I found your collection. Next time hide it

better."

Mike wants to go crouch behind the couch now.

"Why were you in my room?"

"Look, I just needed to borrow a VHS."

"So you thought it would be in my room?"

"It wasn't in the family room. Besides, it was *Tron*."

"Fine. Whatever. That doesn't matter anymore. I just really need to get going. Will's probably done by now. I want to move in before rush hour. Being squeezed like sardines with luggage on the subway doesn't sound like fun."

"Why are you rushing this? I admit, it is a great deal for an apartment in Manhattan, but she said you guys can have the rooms. From what Dustin said, she seemed flexible. Just move in tomorrow. I don't have any shifts tomorrow, so I could help you guys."

"You just want to meet her."

"Is that so wrong? Dustin comes back telling me that my kid brother is head-over-heels for a girl and going to be sharing an apartment with her too. You've never been interested in anyone before. I just want to make sure she isn't a druggie or something."

"She is not a druggie!"

"How would you know? You can't tell when kids are smoking cigarettes or a joint!"

"So?"

"So?! How would you know if she was a junkie? You barely know her! You had one conversation with her!"

"Two. We also talked on the phone. I know her. She isn't a junkie!"

"Really? How do you know this girl?"

"I… I… Well, she just isn't. She likes Star Wars!"

"Mike, everyone likes Star Wars!"

"No, not everyone."

"Ok, fine. You can't use Star Wars as a personality gage though."

"It works…"

"Not really."

Dustin breaks out laughing. Will looks up from his paintings. For the last hour or so Mike had seen Will covering his three oil paintings with some sort of weird liquid. When he asked, Will explained that since they were moving, he was applying a drying medium to his paintings. Apparently they still would not be dry until late tonight, but Will said Jonathan had told him to just leave the paintings here until they were complete and able to be moved. Mike thinks it must help that Will and Jonathan can understand each other through their art. Jonathan liked photography; Will preferred painting. Still, they were able to communicate with each other through their work. Mike sometimes wished he and Nancy had something like this to unite them.

Dustin shakes his head, still laughing.

"You two are ridiculous sometimes" Dustin sputters.

"Not really" Mike replies.

"Really? Then just tell each other the truth. Nancy, you're worried about Mike and you wish he could live with you, which… He can't. We can't. You live with Jonathan in a studio apartment. There's hardly any space for us, and you guys need private time. I don't want to walk in on you guys and be scarred for life. Mike, you want Nancy to treat you like an adult, and you are crushing on Jane. God. If you both just communicated, I swear you wouldn't fight so much. You both are just too proud to admit the truth."

"Ok. I do kind of agree with Dustin. The city is a big place and it is different from Hawkins. I don't want you to get hurt."

"Thanks, Nancy. You can come visit whenever you like. We could order take-out and watch movies, like old times."

"Sounds good. I got work. You'll be alright moving in by yourselves?"

"Yes, now go."

"Fine, but you better pay for the take-out."

"Someone needs to warn Jonathan he's dating the world's biggest cheapskate."

"Actually I learned this from Jonathan. Now I really got to go. I'll be late. Bye! Love you, nerd."

"Love you."

She ruffles his hair and shuffles her keys before running out the door. Mike looks down at his luggage and then at the others. Dustin grabs his luggage and Will struggles to juggle his luggage. Since high school Will always refused to go anywhere without at least his sketchbook, a pencil, and some watercolor paints.

"Does Jonathan know?"

"I left him a note," Will replies.

They stumble out the door. Mike strokes the peeling paint on the door one last time before turning and walking away. They'll be back.

5. Chapter 5

Hey everyone! As a means of apologizing for my delay, here is another chapter. I hope you all like it and that my characters feel authentic. I put a lot of thought into how the characters of would have grown up and adapted in the environments that I've manufactured in this tale. For instance, Eleven is talking in longer bursts than she has in the show so far since she is older and has had more time outside of the lab. I think that having been in the lab for most of her childhood caused Eleven to not usually be a talkative and open person, but that Mike tends to make Eleven feel comfortable and relaxed, so she ends up talking a lot more than usual around him. As for the X-Men characters who I've mentioned, I do not know the X-Men as well as I know Stranger Things, so if you have any thoughts or concerns, please contact me. Have a great day!

-Bomin (博敏)

Chapter Three

Eleven's POV

Eleven jumps at the sound of pounding on the door. Frantically, her head jerks around as she looks for a place to hide. Wait, the boys are moving into her flat today. She only interviewed them a few hours ago, but Mike seemed adamant that they'd all be back this evening. Taking a deep breath, Eleven edges towards the door. Then she hears the muffled voices arguing about whether or not to use the spare key she gave them. Eleven sighs and smiles. Her shoulders relax and she opens the door. She's greeted by ebony eyes and rose lips only a few inches from her own. Her lungs forget how to work and Eleven is left struggling even more than during any of the exercises she has gone through in the training room. She needs to move, but she feels rooted in place.

"Hey, we're back. You really don't mind us moving in so quickly?" Mike asks her.

"No, no… I didn't really have any plans anyway."

"Cool, very cool," Mike replies.

"That I had no plans?"

"Oh, um… I mean… Well…" She sees Dustin nudge Mike in the ribs. He turns to look at Dustin and she hears a slight snicker. "That you seem new to the city as well. We could explore it together sometime, maybe?"

"That would be great." Eleven feels stupid, but she really wants to become friends with these boys. She likes how comfortable she feels around them when she is not standing so close to her dark haired boy that her heart starts dancing and her lungs protesting. At those moments, her mind behaves sluggishly and her words drop from her mouth like fallen leaves; the words had potential, but instead they just shriveled up and died.

"We could be friends?" Mike blurts.

"F-f-friends… Yes." Why is she standing there stuttering like a fool? Still, Eleven's face starts to heat up. No one had directly asked her to be friends before. Everyone back at school had just wordlessly banded together. She likes hearing the word, friends. She especially likes how it sounded when he said it. She moves out of the doorway. That electric spark that'd been racing up and down her body dissipates and Eleven gulps for breath.

"Need help?"

"No thanks, "Mike starts, but he gets interrupted.

"Sure!" says Will. His luggage rests at his feet and he's holding some bulky, rectangular objects wrapped up in a blanket.

"These are just blank. My other stuff needs time to dry. Do you mind if I bring them by later?"

"What are they?"

"Canvases… For painting."

Eleven blinks at him. She'd seen some portraits and the like on the

walls at school, but besides a few Art History classes here and there, she didn't know a lot about art.

"Cool." She should try to seem friendly. Everyone tells her she behaves too bluntly. Logan talks less than her though.

"Maybe I could see some of your art?" There! She knows how to socialize.

"Sure!"

Eleven gingerly picks up Will's luggage and the others follow her into the apartment. They rest their stuff in the living room, which doubles as the kitchen and dining rooms.

She points to the halls on her left and right, "Each of these halls has two rooms. I live over there." She gestures to her right.

"I'll take the room on that hall," Mike says. His pale face has turned pink. Eleven feels her face heat up in a mimicry of his.

"Okay." Her lips turn up and she cannot fight the smile threatening to take over her face. Dustin and Will share a smirk, but stay quiet.

She gingerly puts down Will's canvasses and shows the boys each of the rooms. All of them look relatively similar: beds with generic duvets and a bedside table with a lamp. She'd found a desk at a thrift store and had gotten it for her room, but she'd left the other rooms untouched. She figured her roommates would want to decorate their own rooms. It already seemed weird that their rooms were sparsely furnished, and she didn't want to explain the whole situation yet. None of them seem to care though.

Eleven avoids her room and focuses on helping Will and Dustin move in to avoid thinking about Mike's door being just across the hall from her room; just a mere thought makes her flush. But all the boys only have one piece of luggage and a backpack, so it doesn't take long. When she glances back to offer Mike help, but he's disappeared. She walks back to the main room and notices that his luggage is missing. He must have gone to his bedroom. She sighs and walks to her own room. Maybe it had seemed like she was avoiding him?

As she walks in, she hears a creaking sound. Throwing the door open, Eleven is greeted by a surprised Mike sitting on her bed. She looks at the ground and then back up at him. Filling her cheeks up with air she slowly releases it. Damn, right now would be the perfect time to say something clever and hilarious. Instead she just stands there.

"Hey, sorry I just figured I'd put my stuff away and join you guys in a sec. This is a weird question, but what type of laundry detergent did you use? The bed smells nice. Could I borrow it sometime?"

Talk. Talk. Talk. Talk. Please, just respond to him. Nope, Eleven's English leaves without a trace. Instead, she walks over to the left hand side of the bed and pulls her trunk out from under the bed. She glances up at Mike. His eyes have expanded to the size of golf balls. His face flushes crimson and he fumbles out of the bed.

"God! I am so sorry. I didn't realize. I should have looked harder. Um.. This is so embarrassing. I am so so sorry. I promise I'm not some sort of pervert. Shit. Look, can I make it up to you?"

The words rush from his mouth and Eleven takes a few seconds to process it. She notices his clothes already sprawled on the ground.

"I can move," she says.

"No, no, no! I will move." He starts to gather up his things. She feels a tad amazed that in five minutes or so he's already managed to cover the floor in clothes.
"All my stuff is still in my trunk. You already unpacked."

"Yeah, but… but you slept here." His face looks like a tomato.

"So?" Mike's face becomes inscrutable and she finds herself moving closer to him. She plops onto the bed beside Mike. Overcome with some odd wave of bravery, Eleven laughs and elbows Mike.

"Move over." He seems stunned.

"Ok."

Eleven stares at the white ceiling. She keeps stealing glances at Mike from the corner of her eye. Her arm grazes him, and her stomach

feels like she's just drunken something warm. She sees him watching her and it makes her smile. Eleven never has behaving unpredictably around her dark haired boy. He's special. Boundaries don't seem so clear-cut with him.

"Tell me a secret," he says

What should she tell him? She wants to tell him everything, but she knows that she's not supposed to do that. She's risking other people's lives here. She barely knows Mike, but she's been dreaming of her dark haired boy for years, and she's convinced they are the same person. She hates lying, but maybe a version of the truth could work?

"My mom… Um… I don't know my mom very well. I see her occasionally, but… She isn't really mentally stable. My aunt looks after her."

"I'm so sorry. That must have been really tough."

"I never really saw her before I turned thirteen, so I don't have memories of what she was like before."

"That's terrible. Do you live with your dad then?"

"Uh… Not my biological one… My aunt says she doesn't know and my mom isn't really fit to tell me. I'd like to know, but I don't think I'll ever find out. I've been attending boarding school instead. They have a lot of kids who prefer to just live at the school year-round."

"Is the school allowed to do that? Just offer housing to all these kids? Some of them must have parents."

"A lot of us have parents who disowned us… Or just aren't fit to be parents. My childhood before I started attending boarding school was terrible. I usually just try to ignore the memories from that time. It's stupid. I realize those memories have formed me into the person I am, but if they really did that… Then I would be a monster. Then I am a monster. And I don't really want to acknowledge that."

"No! No! You aren't. You are this incredibly nice, flexible girl. You are the farthest thing from a monster."

"Not really."

"Yes, really! You just let my friends and me move in the first day you met us. You helped Will carry his canvasses, and you've been friendly and genuinely curious about our lives. How can that be monstrous? Besides… You like *Star Wars*. Monsters cannot appreciate *Star Wars*."

"So because I like *Star Wars*, I am not a monster? What if I didn't like it?"

"Then I wouldn't be sitting on your bed right now." Eleven's eyes widen and she starts to move away.

"I was joking. It doesn't matter. Not for you…" Mike lies down and scoots closer to her. His arm grazes Eleven's and she swears he must control electricity or something because every touch of his causes the hairs on her arms to stand up and ripples of pins and needles. "In regards to family, if you want, my mom could be a…. I don't know… a surrogate or something? She might be a little preoccupied sometimes, but she cooks really well. My dad… Well, I feel like I don't really know him. My parents didn't get divorced till I was in high school, but my dad acted like a ghost most of my life. He never listened. He never cared. I shouldn't complain. I know it seems selfish, especially in comparison to what you went through."

"Divorce?"

"It's when two people who were married separate. Some argue over property and who gets the kids. My dad just wanted his La-Z-Boy recliner."

He laughs after that and his lips twitch into a smile. His grimace reminds her of this dog she saw once wrapped up in barbed wire. A lot of the kids back at school look this way when they talk about their families. Sometimes Eleven wonders if it is tougher to have parents who gave you up than to have never known them at all. Her mom… Well, she'd seen into her mom's memories. She knew how her mom had come to be this way. People in the lab had electrocuted her until they'd wiped the brain of Eleven's mom into a nearly blank blackboard; traces of chalk dust could be found, and if one squinted a few letters might show themselves. Now Eleven's mom rocks back

and forth in front of a television and relives the moments of having her baby Jane stolen from her and her mind wiped clean. Thinking about her mom feels like getting kicked in the stomach, but she's pretty sure that living with someone who hates your kind's existence and then calls you an animal to your face after swearing they loved you the night before must last longer than those occasional kicks she feels. As Eleven sees it, either the lab or her being a mutant would have stolen away her parents sooner or later. She got the lab. Most mutants didn't. She doesn't have to wake up crying because the people who packed her lunches and kissed her good-night now pretend she's dead and hold false funerals. Mike's situation might have differed, but he seemed to share the same acidic pain. They're lying side by side, staring at each other. Eleven hugs him. She has no words to give him condolences. She doesn't know how to tell him her thoughts without giving away too much information, so she just tightens her grip and hugs him.

Mike's POV

She's hugging him. He stiffens. He wants to pinch himself to check if he's awake, but instead he just tightens his hold and her head rests in the corner where his shoulder meets his neck. He feels her hot breath and his stomach flips and he worries he'll loose control or that she can tell, but decides to stop caring. Instead, he just savors the sensation. After what seems like both a few seconds and all of eternity, she moves away and Mike misses her warmth. His sister warned him about Jane being a druggie, but she never mentioned Jane being his drug.

"Sorry," she says. Mike stops his laugh before it escapes his lips. She's apologizing for doing something magnificent.

"No, I um liked it."

"Both suck."

Mike turns away and looks at the ceiling. He hopes she doesn't see his blush.

"Yeah, they do," he sighs.

He gets up and starts to pack up his things. He feels like an idiot. He just started throwing around his stuff while unpacking without even pausing to check if Jane already had claimed this room. He'd just assumed her room would already have decorations or something. Nancy always took pride in how her room looked and she'd told him that the first thing she did when she moved into her college dorms and later her apartment was to unpack and decorate. Jane isn't most girls though.

"No, no I'll move," Jane says.

"This is your room though. I should have looked harder."

'It's just four walls, a door, and some furniture. It doesn't matter." She shrugs as the words tumble from her lips and Mike wishes he could understand what hellish childhood had caused her to feel this way. He wants to know why she considers herself a monster. Mike also wants to stay, but that would seem weird.

"No, I'll just move. This is your room. If you want, I could help you decorate it. Maybe it would start to feel a bit more like a home that way?"

"Okay, thanks," Jane smiles.

He shoves his clothes back into his luggage and carries it across the hall. He puts his stuff down and surveys the room. It looks nearly the same, except there's no desk. In her own way, Jane had decorated it, Mike laughs. …

While he's unpacking, he heats a faint knock.

"Come in!" Jane slips in, and the room brightens with her presence.

"I can help you unpack."

"Okay, thanks."

They get to work. Mike folds the clothes and she puts them away. Turns out Jane cannot fold any article of clothing to save her life. It makes Mike laugh and Jane frown.

. "I can learn it. I just don't see the point," she says.

"Maybe so that not all of your clothes are wrinkled?"

"I just leave them in the trunk."

"They still get wrinkled!"

. "Eventually I hang them up."

. "But the closets are small here. What do you do with the rest of your clothes?" She stares at him blankly.

"The closets are big enough." Shoot, had he upset her?

"The place is great. This is New York. No one has a huge closet." She smiles up at him.

"These closets are bigger than the one I shared with three other girls though." Shoot, he had just assumed that if Jane had attended a boarding school that all the girls would have a ton of clothes and huge closets. Typically, only rich people attended boarding school. Jane's school sounded a tad different though and she'd mentioned being a scholarship student. Maybe the school had just put her in a room with other girls who had scholarships?

"What were your roommates like?" She smiles when he asks her.

"Well, Laura is like a sister. She's gruff and she considers actions more important than words, but I've never met anyone as loyal or as brave. We fight a lot, but I know she always has my best interests at heart. Betsy… Well, I didn't really know her that well at first. We just seemed like different people. But…But after she studied abroad in Japan she really changed. We started talking after that. Both of us gained a better understanding of the other. Jubilee, well she's a living firework. Her laugh fills the room and she's always looking for an adventure and a way to prove herself. Something about her just draws people." She smiles as she talks and Mike finds himself entranced by her lips. As they move, his stomach warms and his heart beats. He watches her eyes widen when she finishes talking. She seems a tad shocked.

"What's the matter?" Maybe she misses her roommates? It seems like she's close with them. "You could invite them to come visit you. I'm sure they'll want to see your new apartment and meet your new roommates."

"Yes, I think I will." Jane pauses and bites her lip. Mike's heart hammers and his stomach quivers; he never realized the sexiness of lip biting before, but Jane's luscious pink lips remind him of a blooming flower and he aches to become a bee and rest on those sweet, blossoming flower-lips. "I just… I just don't usually talk this much."

"I like listening to you talk. You should do it more then." She laughs as the words spill from Mike's mouth.

Standing in front of his near empty closet, holding a pile of clothes, Mike realizes that he's addicted; until his last breath, Mike will work to earn more bell-like laughter and see more blooming flower smiles. He needs her. Jane turned Mike into a junkie.

6. Chapter 6

Hey everyone! 博敏 (Bomin) here! I hope that you like this chapter. I worry that the pacing is a tad slow, but I also want to establish a strong foundation before exploring the deeper themes of this story and beginning the rising action. Please tell me your thoughts and leave comments, so I know how to better improve your reading experience. Have a great day!

Chapter 4

Dustin's POV

Dustin knows Mike wants to become a psychiatrist, but sometimes he cannot stop himself from laughing at his friend's obliviousness. Jane already likes Mike, yet he trips over himself trying to impress her. Dustin feels a tad relieved though. He's never seen Mike show any interest in a girl before. Lucas has dated Max for years. Those two have dated long enough that Lucas's family talks about Max like she's a member of the family. Dustin noticed the extra stocking they hang for her every Christmas. Dustin liked a girl before. His heart still stirs sometimes when he sees her grin, but Dustin just smothers his smile. He couldn't hurt Lucas. Besides, he and Lucas both fought for Max's favor when she moved to Hawkins back in eighth grade. Dustin lost. Lucas and Max understood each other. They both were formed from the same clay. Dustin could never make Max happy the way Lucas does. Even Will shuffled and twirled with a couple girls here and there at different school dances. Mike just sat dazed and confused in the corner.

Every time Dustin asked him about girls, Mike would just shake his head and shrug, muttering about the heroine of his dreams. Dustin had bitten his tongue each time; he didn't want to break the news that Princess Leia's actress Carrie Fisher probably acted completely different out of the movie and that she didn't want to date young boys. Turns out Carrie Fisher didn't star in Mike's dreams, another girl did, a girl like Jane.

Jane leaves Dustin feeling unsettled and confused each time they meet. The girl feels alien; Dustin can tell she fought battles Dustin

never even thought of. Her concerns and his differ completely. Dustin worries about his mom and his friends. He agonized about being accepted into university and being left behind and forgotten. Jane has the battered body of someone busy ducking blows and finding her next meal.

Having already put away his stuff, Dustin sits in Will's room as the young artist organizes and re-organizes his paints and pencils. Both of them wordlessly agreed to give the love birds their space. Besides Lucas and Max, who met and began dating back in middle school, none of the others went on a single date. Steve coached Dustin, and Nancy offered him encouragement, but so far no girl looked at him twice. He likes to blame it on all those years with a lisp, but Dustin knows that he just doesn't leave as strong of an impression on people as his friends.

People forget Dustin. He lacks Will's introverted artistry, Lucas's loud boisterousness, Mike's intuitive leadership. Dustin thinks he must resemble a marshmallow: soft, sweet, and kind of bland. He tried to assert himself more in high school, but he kept resorting back to that boy who patches up disagreements. He has no distinct talents. Sure, he likes science, but all of them enjoyed it. Besides, he looked over at Mike's test results. He knows that Mike got better marks. All of the others are striking out and pursuing foreign and exciting new careers, while Dustin is reaching for the familiar job of being a teacher. No one ohs and ahs over teachers. Still, Dustin wants to become a teacher like Mr. Clark. He wants to inspire children and to give them the confidence to explore the limits of their world.

He leans back on Will's bedframe and clears his throat. Will looks up with a quirked brow.

"How long until they start dating?" Will just shrugs.

"Depends on how truthful they are with each other." Dustin laughs. Will always gives weird answers that make sense later.

Eleven's POV

Something about Mike, her dark haired boy, warms her chest and loosens her tongue. Around him, she talks about fears she never

previously voiced aloud. She discusses topics that she kicked into the corner of her mind, like dirty laundry she wanted to avoid looking at. Mike makes Eleven feel. Usually she struggles to register her emotions; she grew up being taught to suppress them. Mike heightens her feelings and illuminates her worries. Eleven never told anyone she feared that her time in the lab turned her into a monster before.

Laura would understand these concerns, but talking about this would cause Laura to remember her own childhood. Unlike Eleven, Laura shucked off her number and embraced her name. Talking about the past pained Laura. Laura's eyes glinted with the flickering light of a dying soul and her claws popped out at the mere mention of scientists. Eleven saw Laura cutting herself once. Blood seeped through the crack in the doorway and Eleven nearly cried out. Laura's dulled eyes blinked at her, and Eleven silently promised to support Laura.

With Mike, these fears loose their weight. Basking in his warmth, nothing from her past seems as serious anymore. Mike's smile erases her pain. With Mike around, Eleven gains objectivity. She realizes no monster hides under her bed and those memories hidden in the closet of her mind can no longer physically hurt her. Papa probably died in that fire. Her hand itches to hold his. Eleven thinks that just prolonging her contact with Mike could heal all of her scars. Instead, she just finds excuses to simply stay beside him.

They already put all of his clothes away, but now Eleven wants to extend the process of decorating. She ponders every poster and asks questions about each and every one. He smiles and chimes an answer every time. They tango around his room in a complicated dance of decorating: her clutching the poster, him holding the tape and tacks, both of them avoiding the task at hand. He finally grabs the last poster from her and she slumps onto his bed. She slumps onto his bed and stares at the ceiling with its patchwork of posters: *ET, Star Wars, Ghostbusters, Tron,* and several without titles.

Mike clutches volumes of books in his hands. He delicately starts to place them on the floor, but she sits up and stops him.

"May I see them?"

"Sure." He passes her the books that he held so tightly that his knuckles became stripped like the candy canes Jean passes out around Christmas. She glances at the titles: *Frankenstein*, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, *Macbeth*, *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Don Quixote, The Essential Neruda*. She read most of these already. Jane smiles and hands him *Frankenstein*.

"This is one of my favorite books."

"Really? I like it a lot too. We had to read it for class, but I ended up really appreciating the themes. I empathized it, especially with how the creator worked so hard to make his monster, yet abandoned it the second the creation did not reach his standards… Frankenstein reminds me of my dad. He never seemed to care or to appreciate us. He always had his eyes focused elsewhere. Sometimes it feels like he rejected me before even getting to know me. The teacher never mentioned this way of interpreting the tale, but thinking of the story this way just makes it so relatable." Mike laughs and he has the wounded dog smile again. Eleven reaches for his hand and squeezes it.

"I understand the monster: everyone is terrified, yet no one cares enough to listen to me and to accept my existence." She probably shouldn't have told him this. His ebony eyes bore into her own, and it feels as if he can read her thoughts. His arms wrap around her and she forgets about the world outside of this room.

"Dinner?" She nods against his shoulder and they shuffle out of his room.

Mike's POV

Mike cannot fathom how Jane the breathing miracle can consider herself a monster. To him, Jane seems like magic. She lights up the room and holds him captive with her gaze. Her voice enraptures him, and he finds himself wanting to ask her questions just to listen to her lilting, melodic voice. Still, she mentioned considering herself a monster a few times now, and each of these instances tore through Mike. He wants to understand what caused Jane to think of herself this way. What happened in her childhood? She alluded to having a

tough time before she started attending this boarding school, but she avoided telling him any details. He doesn't want to hurt her, but Mike thinks that Jane ought to confront these feelings at some point. He wants to help guide her through the progress. He just wants to make Jane happy any way he can.

Jane opens the freezer and Mike sees walls of Eggo waffles filling the entire freezer department. Jane glances over the boxes; her eyebrows crinkle and Mike's heart jumps. She grabs a box and starts to tear it open. Mike reaches for her hand to stop her, and she glances up with a quirked brow.

"I like eggos, but maybe we should eat something more substantial for dinner?" he asks. She just blinks. Mike stifles a laugh. "Maybe we could all just share meals? We could split the grocery bills and take turns cooking. I got dinner covered." She looks up at him.

"But these are chocolate chip." Her doe eyes bore into his and Mike laughs.

"Yes, but waffles are a breakfast food. I mean… we could have a weekly breakfast for dinner, I guess? But eating waffles for every meal cannot be healthy." He exams her lithe form and then looks back at the freezer full of Eggos. Jane must belong to that category of girls he constantly hears Nancy complaining about: the girls who eat anything and everything, yet never gain a pound. Mike thinks Nancy looks thin, but anytime he tells her that she just hits him, so he learned to shut up and let Jonathan deal with her.

"Can we have breakfast for dinner tonight then?"

"Ah, ok. I guess it is a special occasion. We should go grocery shopping tomorrow though." Eventually eating only waffles would make her sick. Mike doesn't have a ton of money to spare, but he decides that he will make sure Jane eats properly, no matter the additional cost.

"I've been fine with waffles though."

"I just think a little diversity might be good. Let me cook some real food for you."

"Okay, but remember we have plenty of waffles… Just in case."

"You'll like real food. It tastes better than just Eggo waffles." Jane just stares at him blankly.

"I doubt that."

"But you'll give it a chance?" She nods slowly. Mike hears clattering and looks away to see Dustin and Will. Will just glances at the box in Jane's hands and smiles.

"I heard something about breakfast for dinner?" Will says.

"Yeah, it's a new tradition," says Mike.

"Next time we should make pancakes from scratch or something. Steve makes these killer pancakes," chimes in Dustin.

Mike imagines Steve humming in the kitchen wearing a yellow apron. After Nancy and Steve broke up, Steve somehow lost the title of "Steve the Cool Guy" and became "Steve the Mom" instead. Steve drove them to dances, gave them bad dating advice, told them hair care secrets, and frantically tried to clean up after the boys. Mike never tasted pancakes made by Steve, but he imagines that they would taste shockingly good. After all, Steve the Mom made them.

"Eggos are better though," says Jane.

"No way! You never tried pancakes made by Steve. They beat every breakfast food you can think of!"

"Even my Mom's waffles?" asks Mike.

"Sorry Mike, but yes. Steve just has this way of cooking them… It's magical."

"I think you worship Steve too much. How can he beat Mike's Mom in cooking?" asks Will.

"He doesn't always beat Mike's Mom. He just makes better breakfast food. He taught me that cooking a good breakfast will guarantee you win a girl's heart."

"How's that working out for you so far?" asks Mike.

"I haven't made a girl breakfast yet. When I do, she'll fall madly in love with me. You better be careful!" Dustin laughs and looks at Mike, who blushes.

Mike looks at Jane and sees her chuckling. He smiles and wants to thank Dustin suddenly. Jane plops two waffles into the toaster and turns around. Her eyes meet Mike's and his blush deepens. He moves to lean against the counter and mimic Jane's stance. She inches towards him and their arms nearly touch as Mike leans back. Electricity crackles along Mike's arm and he shivers with pleasure. Jane brightens the world to Technicolor clarity. Trying to remember his life before her just summons a reel of silent, black and white moments. Only that precious night and day with his magnet girl, who he hopes is also Jane, and those hazy, half-remembered memories stand out amongst the blur of his mundane memories.

The second pair of waffles pop up and Mike moves to grab them. His hands accidentally brush Jane's and a wave of goose bumps spread across his forearm. Her face turns pink and he notices that even the tips of her ears appear rosy. Wordlessly, he puts the waffles on a plate and hands them to her. He then grabs another pair of waffles, puts them in the toaster for Will or Dustin, and jostles the plate of quickly cooling waffles onto his forearm and slips into a nearby seat at the pinewood table. Jane plops down next to him. He laughs. She usually seems to glide through the apartment like a swan in a lake, but even she has her ungraceful moments. Mike recalls seeing swans waddle on the shoreline alongside Hawkin's only lake. He guesses no creature can always appear perfect and poised.

Jane passes him maple syrup and silverware. He hears waffles jump out of the toaster. Dustin yelps and a plate clatters, but Mike doesn't want to access the damage. Right now he just wants to continue staring at Jane. He fears blinking. If he closes his eyes for even a millisecond, she may disappear and he'll wake up half-smothered by Dustin's blue sleeping bag back in Nancy's cluttered studio apartment. Jane starred in so many of Mike's dreams that he can no longer tell the difference between fiction and fact.

The girl in his dreams, the magnet girl, and Jane seem like the same

person. In his mind, he superimposes their images and voices, and these three figures appear to match up. Mike worries his wishful thinking might be forcing these three separate girls to become one, like a little kid mashing puzzle pieces together in a jigsaw puzzle. Still, his gut agrees with him. Mike usually ignores his gut in favor of his brain, but it seems like his mind and gut agree for once. Now he just needs to gather evidence to prove his hypothesis. Mike smiles and takes a bite of his Eggos. With the maple syrup, they taste nearly too sweet.

7. Chapter 7

Chapter Five

Eleven's POV

Dinner passes with a cacophony of laughter and rushed plans. Eleven stays silent throughout most of it; she enjoys listening and witnessing the bonds these boys share. They treat friendship like breathing: no thinking, no hesitating, no worries; they just do, and somehow that strengthens their bonds. Besides, she finds herself drifting off into fantasies featuring Mike's rosy lips and porcelain skin. Her stomach flips and flops like a fish; she feels guilty. He probably thinks of her as merely a friend, yet he stars in her daydreams. She wonders if he remembers her. They've talked privately two times now, but Mike never mentioned meeting a little girl one night.

She knows that Mike showed her around that time she escaped. Eleven used her abilities to reach out to him through dreams constantly since that fateful encounter. Eleven can recognize her dark-haired boy even in a crowded city street. She just wanted to talk with him first. She needed to double-check. Desperate people rush decisions. Eleven dreamt and hoped of him for so long that when he turned up at her doorstep, it seemed television perfect: some happily-ever-after acted out with by impossibly pretty people reading a clichéd script.

So, now Eleven waits. After talking with Mike a few times now, it doesn't seem like Mystique morphed into the boy. Eleven left enough openings to tempt Mystique or any other member of the Brotherhood. She wants to tell Mike her secret. She wants to watch his face as she tells the story. If she can just stare into his eyes while the words tumble from her lips, she'll know if he feels the same: like a frostbitten explorer, finally offered fire, a bed, food, and a listening ear.

But if the wrong person knows Eleven's secret, hundreds of lives could be harmed. Eleven didn't live alone for all these years, and she already implied that her school had some unique aspects. The wrong person would realize Eleven had attended a school for mutants. The

wrong person would then alert the authorities. The wrong person would cause the destruction of Eleven's home and the pain of her family. Eleven believes Mike belongs firmly in the category of the right person: someone empathetic and trustworthy who can keep a secret. However, telling Mike her secret means telling the secret of everyone who attends Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters.

Eleven can't bare to act that selfishly. Instead, she promises to wait for Mike to ask. If he asks her, she'll tell him her truth. She won't lie, not to him. He taught her that friends never lie to each other all those years ago. Since then, Eleven lied more times than she'd like to admit, but she staunchly avoids lying to the people she loves. She looks at Mike and feels the fateful flush; she loves him. It took less than two days for Eleven to fall in love with Mike. Hell, she loved him since that night they slept side by side in a cramped fort and Mike taught her the constellations. Eleven loved Mike before she understood what love meant.

Mike's POV

Mike lies in bed, reflecting on the day. He feels certain that the girl he met that one night must be Jane. They share the same melodic accent, both have his chunky black watch, and their facial features even seem similar. Jane looks exactly like an elder version of his magnet girl. Still, he wants to wait a little longer before asking her. He doesn't want to bring up ghosts from his past and ruin his present chances with Jane. Well, first he needs to know if she likes him. Sharing an apartment with the girl who rejected you just sounds like a nightmare. Perhaps Nance had been right. Maybe he shouldn't have moved in with Jane. Mike feels drawn to Jane like a magnet; she just has this undeniable pull, and he finds his thoughts straying to her every unfocused moment. But what if she doesn't feel the same way? The thought sends ice water through his veins. Mike shivers and pulls the blanket up to his chin.

Crash!

Mike bolts out of bed. He rushes to Jane's room, then knocks on the door and waits. Silence. He knocks again. No reply. Taking a deep breath and hoping that Jane won't mind, he bursts into her room.

"Jane, are you ok? I heard a crash." He rushes through the words in a desperate hope that she won't get angry. Jane snores faintly and turns over in bed. Mike can't suppress his smile. The brown blankets are bunched up around her feet, and her pillow fell to the floor. He picks up her pillow and places it beside her. The next time she turns over, her head will rest on the pillow instead of the bed. He untangles the blankets and pulls them up to her chin. He then tip-toes out of her room and slowly shuts the door. Lying back in bed, Mike wonders what caused such a loud sound before dozing off.

Bam!

Mike hurtles out of bed. Looking around blearily, he struggles to push aside the dissipating dreams and to think clearly. Then he hears a high-pitched scream. Mike sprints to Jane's room. This time, he doesn't offer machine-gun fast excuses, instead he slides to Jane's side. She looks like a deer caught in the headlights.

"Are you ok?"

"Bad men. Killed a cat. White room."

"It's ok. There are no bad men here. I'm here. I am a good person." Mike tentatively wraps his arms around Jane and she clings to Mike like a drowning person clings to a safety raft. Mike feels a tad selfish for enjoying her embrace. He strokes her brown curls. Her frantic heartbeat slows and Jane's grip loosens a little. She looks up at him and slowly her eyes start to focus on his face.

"You're here, in New York, with me. You are safe. I got you. I can protect you." Mike means it. In that moment, with her clutching him so desperately, he promises to himself and to her that he'll always look after her.

"Mike?"

"Yes, it's me. Mike." He laughs with relief. She reaches for one of his curls and twists it between her fingers. The action draws them closer together and Mike knows that if he just leaned down a little, he could kiss her. He aches to let his lips touch her own. She has irresistibly kissable lips: so plump and pink. But, Mike doesn't take advantage of

people, so he just smiles at Jane and strokes her head to calm her down, while she plays with his hair.

"Dark-haired boy."

"Yeah, I guess," he laughs. "Do you feel better? What happened? I heard a crash."

"Nightmare."

"But the crash?"

"Bad nightmare."

"But… Nightmares don't cause crashes."

"Lamp fell."

"Oh, well, as long as you are safe. Are you? Ok that is?"

"…"

"I could sit here, if you want? I won't do anything! I swear. I just… When my little sister, Holly, has nightmares she likes for me to sit beside her bed and just tell her stories till she falls asleep. She won't accept anyone else. She likes my stories the best, I guess."

Thinking of little Holly makes Mike's chest tighten. He ought to call his Mom tomorrow and ask how they are both doing. Nancy offered to let him use the landline back at her place, but he shrugged it off each time. Calling either of his parents leaves Mike feeling unsettled and he struggles to sleep for days after the strained conversations. He feels angry with and resentful of how his father ignored Mike and the rest of the family for most of their lives and left Mike's mom to struggle as a practically single mom. At least Joyce had freedom. Before her divorce, the only freedom Mike's mom had was flipping through romance books in the bath. He hadn't realized it at the time, but when they moved to a smaller house and he saw the walls of water-stained Harlequin romances and the revolving door of muscular men taking his mom on dates, Mike slowly put two and two together.

Mike doesn't blame his Mom for the divorce. Actually, he now supports it completely. As a divorcee, Karen bloomed. Her cheeks regained their youthful flush. She stopped baking casseroles and started experimenting with French cuisine. She began working at the Macy's thirty minutes down the road, since none of the places in town wanted to hire her. There she caked on foundation and blended blush for teenage girls and aging moms. She claimed that she was helping these females realize their inner beauty. At the next Presidential election, she not only voted Democrat, but even went door to door trying to convince others to do the same. Her mantra had been that you didn't have to vote like your husband. Most of the time people slammed the door in her face, but sometimes a hopeful and curious smile would answer her instead. Still, even though he supports the divorce, sometimes Mike feels a resulting whip-lash from it. The mom from his childhood memories disappeared, and Karen the divorcee took her place. He likes Karen, but she still feels like a stranger sometimes. Only those waterlogged books hint at Karen's past self, Mrs. Wheeler, Mike's first Mom.

"Would you?"

"Oh, do you want me to tell you a story?"

"Yes… Please."

"Ok, um…. I haven't done this for a while, so I might be rusty. Is that ok?"

"No problem."

Mike usually just re-tells his campaigns from Dungeons and Dragons or fairy-tales, but he wants to impress Jane. So, he tells her the story he repeats to himself every night.

"Once upon a time, a princess was trapped in a tower by evil priests. They shaved her head to prevent her from using her hair as a ladder for princes and tortured her every day. Eventually, she decided to stop waiting on a prince and rescued herself. You see, she wasn't just any ordinary princess. This princess was a mage. So, she levitated down the tower and escaped in the middle of the night and met a toad-faced goblin.

This goblin talked and talked, but she found him amusing and kept him around. They became good friends, but the evil priests were still after the princess. The goblin tried to help her, by showing the princess how to navigate the tunnels of his kingdom, so that she could hide there, but the priests used a tracking spell and soon found the pair. Fearful that her new friend would be hurt, the princess tried to distract the evil priests and give the goblin a chance to escape, but instead he stabbed one of the priests through the eye.

Wounded, the priest slashed the goblin, who jumped back just in time to avoid being hurt. The goblin flipped over the priest and knocked him unconscious with the butt of his sword. Meanwhile, the princess worked on a spell to freeze all of the priests. While she chanted, the goblin fought the priests in order to distract them, but one of the ten priests slipped away. The goblin realized this and rushed to protect the princess, who was in the middle of chanting. However, it was too late for him to parry the sword, so instead he jumped in front of the blade to protect the princess. The evil priest pierced the goblin's heart. With his last breaths, the goblin asked the princess to kiss him. Crying, she did. With a burst of light, the goblin became a handsome paladin. The princess hugged him and asked why he was no longer a goblin. With a laugh, the paladin explained that he was under a curse to remain a goblin until he met a girl who loved him, despite his flaws. Glancing into her eyes for permission, the paladin then kissed the princess again. Smiling, he told the princess mage that she brings out the best in him. With their hands clasped, they walked away from the evil priests and led a life full of love and adventures."

Mike looks down, while Jane snores quietly. He ruffles her hair and tip-toes back to his room. Sinking back into bed, Mike falls asleep thinking about that embrace from the girl sleeping across the hall from him.

…

Mike awakes up before his alarm starts beeping. He slips out of bed, stretches and wonders if any of the others woke up yet. Mike, unlike Dustin and Will, belongs to an endangered teenage species, the early birds. Lucas also tends to wake up earlier, but Mike attributes that more to Lucas's self-discipline than natural tendencies. Part of Mike hopes that Jane also woke up, but his romantic side keeps imagining

making her waffles in bed. Wow, he really needs to stop fantasizing.

Hobbling into the kitchen, he sees Jane sitting at the table with a plate of Eggos. Smiling, he slides into the seat beside her own.

"So, my sister was hoping to drop by this evening, probably around dinner. She doesn't have work today, and wanted to see our new place. Is that ok? Will's brother, Jonathan, might come. He works weddings, parties, and by appointments, so his schedule is less predictable. Um…So I'm not really sure. Is that ok? They wanted to maybe get take-out and play games or watch a movie."

Jane blinks blearily and rubs her eyes. Gesturing for him to wait, she takes a bite of waffle, chews, and then looks up with more lively eyes.

"Okay… May I join?"

"Yeah, of course. You know her coming over is just an excuse to meet you, right? She doesn't really care that much about our apartment. I mean, she cares… But more in a there are no rats and no gas leaks type of way. Not a spend the entire evening at our place sort of way. Otherwise, Nancy would probably invite us to go out or something. She's been trying to push me to go out and meet people since we all arrived. It's exhausting… I mean, she means well. This is how she shows that she cares. She wants us to make friends and be social. But, I'm just not like that."

Jane blinks, drags her waffle across the plate to soak up more syrup, and takes another bite before speaking.

"But, you talk a lot."

"Yeah, because I'm nervous!" Mike laughs… Oh wait, shit he said that out loud!

"Why are you nervous? Am I a bad roommate?"

"No. No! NO! You are fantastic. I'm just not really used to making new friends, I guess. I mean… the boys and I grew up together and besides Max, we never really branched out. And we met Max the last year of middle school… So We went all four years of high school

without making a single new friend. We aren't anti-social exactly. I guess we are just kinda nerdy and geeky and sorta content being just friends with each other. I mean, we are the party. We were always the party."

"Who is Max?" Eleven stares into his face, and he swears that the corner of her lips have tightened.

"She's Lucas's girlfriend. They started dating practically less than a week after she joined the party. She's cool, I guess."

"Lucas's girlfriend?" Eleven's face has slackened into a lazy smile and she picks up her fork and knife and begins to eat her remaining waffle.

"Yeah! Lucas is great! You'd like him. He's in California with Max. He decided to become a cop, so he's not attending NYU. It's a shame. He's really smart, but he always had a strict sense of justice and liked to pretend to be Rambo or some action hero or another. I guess it kinda makes sense. Plus… He faced a lot of racism in our tiny town. I think he wants to be a cop to try and protect people unfairly discriminated against… He never said that… But I kinda got that feeling from him when he talked about it, and Max sorta implied the same thing."

"What do you mean by party?"

"Oh, it's this D&D term… Oh, sorry. I mean Dungeon and Dragons. It is this game we play sometimes."

"May I play? I heard about it and wanted to try, but no one would play with me." She puts her fork and knife down, and looks mournfully at the empty plate.

"Oh, uh. Sure! I would love to… I mean, that would be fun." Mike keeps rambling like some idiot. He needs to just shut up and go make breakfast.

"Thanks. I always wanted to play." Jane smiles and his heart stops.

"Where did you hear about it?"

"From this boy I knew."

"Oh, um… what was he like?"

"Nice, he talked a lot. I liked listening to him." She blushes. What if Jane has a crush on this guy? He can't compete with a childhood crush. He thought that he may have a chance yesterday, but maybe Jane treats everyone that way? She hasn't talked with Dustin or Will as much, but he never gave her an opportunity to talk with them. He kept hovering around her and striking up conversation. What if she found him annoying? But, she hugged him multiple times. You wouldn't hug someone who irks you, right?

"I moved away, shortly after I met him."

"Do you miss him?"

"He was my first friend." She starts to fidget with the black plastic watch on her wrist. Again, Mike swears that watch looks exactly like the one he gave his magnet girl. He wonders if he is the little boy she is talking about. He watches her fidget and a wave of guilt washes over him. She doesn't want to talk about it.

"Want more waffles?"

"Sure!"

"Ok, I'll make you some. Do you have any coffee? Or anything besides Eggos?" Mike moves to put some Eggos in the toaster. He slides back into his chair and turns to stare at Jane. Her delicate features remind him of an elf.

"I think I got juice… I also got butter and syrup." She gestures to the syrup beside her plate and Mike laughs.

"Thanks, there's a lot of options, but I'll have to go with the Eggo waffles."

"They're a classic."

"I think they are your entire diet."

"Do you really need anything else?"

"I don't know, real food?"

"But Eggos are better."

"Don't you get sick of them?"

"Not yet. They didn't really have Eggos back at my school, so I'm making up for lost time."

"You survived how many years without Eggos? I just can't imagine it. What did you eat?"

"It was a painful time for my palate, but I survived. The school cafeteria doesn't take personal requests."

"So, when did you eat your first Eggo?"

"When I was twelve."

"Describe the memory. Give me details."

"I was… camping… with a friend and we ate Eggos and looked at the stars. It was the first time I felt… Happy and content. It was nice." Jane looks up at him wistfully, her ears tipped scarlet. Her eyes appear to be staring somewhere else, somewhere no longer real. At that moment, she reminds him of one of the princesses in one of Holly's books: delicate features, an ethereal air, a distracted look, and indescribable beauty. The waffle pops up and he bursts out of his chair to get it, before putting in another set for himself. Holding the burning waffles between his thumb and forefinger, he drops them on Jane's plate and blows on his fingertips to divert the burning pain.

"It sounds like you are attached to Eggos more for an emotional reason than their taste. They seem like a way of trying to reclaim your childhood by trying to remake this memory."

"… Probably."

"Sorry, I probably shouldn't have done that." He walks over to get his waffles.

"No, it's okay. It's probably true… Just maybe a tad odd."

"Yeah, it is I guess," He laughs awkwardly. "A lot of crazy stuff happened to Will, and then after my parents divorced I realized how important good therapy can be in helping people heal. After all that, I sorta decided I wanted to become a therapist too, and I've been trying to really listen to people and understand them ever since. It's probably stupid, since I talk so much… I'm not always a great listener, but I want to get better."
"You want to help people? That sounds… Noble."

"I mean; I think everyone wants to just help others. We all just have different ways of doing it."

"Not everyone."

"Who made you feel that way?"

"Just people from my childhood."

"I don't want to be rude, but have you ever thought about their motivations?"

"Good people don't do what they did."

"Sorry, it's a painful memory to talk about over breakfast, huh?" Mike turns to go grab his waffles. Idiot. How could be so stupid? To imply that she's wrong about something when he's just this delusional, privileged kid? He feels a cold hand wrap around his wrist. His face flushes as he turns to look back at her.

"It is nice to talk with you. I'm just not always the best talker. I can sound blunt."

"Nah, it is better to speak bluntly and honestly than to compliment and lie. Friends don't lie to each other." Shoot, is he being too forward? He just awkwardly assumed they were friends. Her ears flush scarlet and she looks up at him with those big, doe eyes that make his knees feel weak.

"Friends?"

"Yeah, if you want to be?"

"Y-yes." Mike turns away quickly to hide the grin threatening to split his face in half. He plies his lukewarm waffles out of the toaster and plonks back down to breakfast.

Together, they make plans for the day. Jane offers to help them find desks and decorations, while Mike insists on a trip to the grocery store for real food. He never spent much effort bothering to cook before, but he glanced over his mom's shoulders sometimes while she was cooking. It shouldn't be too difficult. He and Jane were about to abandon the boys when Dustin and Will finally slogged into the room. Tired of waiting, Mike rushes the boys through breakfast, while Jane goes off to shower.

"So… How was last night? Anything exciting happen? I heard some banging?" Dustin asks while wagging his eyebrows up and down. Mike just smacks him.

"No, idiot. She just had a nightmare and her lamp fell."

"Hmm… Sounds like a shoddy excuse to me."

"No, they didn't do anything. Both of them are too timid," interrupts Will.

"I'm not timid!"

"She's been giving you plenty of signs that she's into you, yet you pretend that you have no clue, despite constantly claiming you want to be a psychiatrist for three years now. Either you need to think about a new career, or you're just timid."

"Isn't that sorta harsh, Will?" Asks Mike.

"Sorry, I just have a headache."

"Nah, it's cool. I just wondered."

"I'm on Will's side. We've barely moved in, but it seems obvious you both are some lovesick puppies. Why haven't you made a move?"

"What if I'm wrong? What if I'm just egocentrically interpreting her actions into reciprocation when she's actually just nice like this to everyone? If I'm wrong, it would ruin everything. All our social interactions would be super awkward. For now, I am just content being able to talk with her and be her friend."

"You sure about that, buddy?" Asks Dustin.